

The many surviving accounts of miracles which took place at shrines provide important clues about the mood of religious sensibility around the time of Urban's appeal. One example, a story from the shrine of St Winnoc at the monastery of Bergues in north-eastern France, serves as a good illustration. It should be noted that we are here dealing with a literary form, the *miraculum* composed according to an established generic typology. This means that the events are unlikely to have unfolded exactly as described, though they may have some basis in fact. The story's true interest lies in the way that an idealized depiction of reality can itself throw light on actual attitudes and behaviour. The narrative proceeds as follows. It was Pentecost (that is to say, the early summer) and large crowds had been drawn to the monastic church. Some were local people, others outsiders attracted by St Winnoc's reputation. One day, as the faithful in the nave pressed forward towards the shrine, a small blind girl, who had become something of a mascot to the assembled crowd, found herself isolated at the back. She was therefore passed hand to hand over the heads of the throng until she reached the front, where some of Winnoc's relics were being displayed to the crowd in a feretory, a portable reliquary. The people looked heavenward and prayed that, through the saint's intercession, God might grant the girl her sight. For good measure they added that they would become more assiduous in their attendance at the church should they be given such a sign. Suddenly the girl became convulsed and the sockets of her eyes began to haemorrhage. A short time later she announced that she was able to see.

³ Several features of this story bear upon the religious culture which activated crusade enthusiasm. Of particular interest is the way in which the actions of the crowd illustrate the routinely communal nature of devotional behaviour. The girl was the central figure, of course, but the group participated fully at critical junctures: by selecting the girl for special attention, by co-operating in order to maximize her exposure to Winnoc's *virtus*, and by collectively invoking the saint's aid. The scene played out in the church served to cement existing solidarities—here the bonding between those who lived nearby—and also created a new group identity which united the locals and the disparate collection of pilgrims from further afield. The monks, moreover, were not passive bystanders. As the story stands it describes a spontaneous outpouring of pious energy from the laity, but it is reasonable to suspect a measure of prompting, even collusive stage-management, on the monks' part. A consideration of where and when the events occurred further suggests that the monks of Bergues made it their business to create conditions in which the people's religious impulses could be stimulated and directed. The fact that the feretory was being displayed when the miracle happened reinforces the point: the excitement had been built up until it exploded at the critical moment. Once reached, moreover, the heightened mood could be sustained and channelled into a collective reaffirmation of faith by exploiting the tendency, very common at that time, to react to excitement or agitation through an expressive emotional outpouring. The author of the story understood the mood of the people well, using it to make an interesting comparison as he described how the faithful's prayers, loud and undisciplined, merged with the more orderly chant coming from the monks in the choir. Here in microcosm was the eleventh-century

Church in a
inforcemen
tween nave
points of c
taining con

One ele
come more
thor was c
process wh
the locality
also a deep
ert of Nog
Laon to pr
proposed b
cue, the yc
Guibert's p
thenticity c
plicity poi



important
One exam-
rth-eastern
with a liter-
This means
have some
reality can
ows. It was
the monas-
ation. One
rl, who had
it the back.
reached the
feretory, a
aint's inter-
they would
such a sign.
orrhage. A

crusade en-
ate the rou-
, of course,
il attention,
lectively in-
ing solidar-
new group
rther afied.
bes a spon-
t a measure
deration of
ade it their
ulated and
d reinforces
ment. Once
a collective
react to ex-
of the story
rison as he
ore orderly
nth-century

Church in action: two groups, the lay and the clerical, engaged in a relationship of mutual re-
inforcement. Each performed a distinctive role (here symbolized by the spatial separation be-
tween nave and choir) but within the unifying context of a ritualistic devotion focused on the
points of contact (the shrine, the feretory, and Winnoc) and geared to generating and main-
taining communal enthusiasm.

One element of the story which might seem to jar is the crowd's promise that it would be-
come more devout if it were given a miracle. On one level this is a topos of the genre: the au-
thor was compressing into one manageable sequence of cause and effect a much lengthier
process whereby Winnoc's cult would have extended its reputation and insinuated itself into
the locality's devotional habits. But underlying the reference to the crowd's promise there is
also a deeper sensitivity to lay sentiment, evidence for which can be found elsewhere. Guib-
ert of Nogent, for example, tells the story of some knights who dared a party of canons from
Laon to procure a miracle cure from the Virgin Mary. The canons were daunted because the
proposed beneficiary, a mute youth, seemed a hopeless case. But the Virgin came to the res-
cue, the youth began to utter sounds, and the knights abjectly acknowledged their error.
Guibert's purpose in reporting the episode was to glorify the Virgin and demonstrate the au-
thenticity of her relics kept at Laon. But, like the writer of the Bergues miracle, he also im-
plicitly points to clerical anxiety that lay piety was fixated with the idea of quid pro quo. The

fear was that the faithful were inclined to
vary the intensity of their religious commit-
ment according to how well their material
preoccupations, their anxieties, even their
curiosity, came to be addressed through con-
tact with institutionalized religion.

The sort of fears implied by Guibert and
the Bergues author have been seized upon by
critics to argue that lay religiosity in the
Middle Ages was superficial and literalistic,
nothing more than the culturally acquired
gloss upon basic psychological and social im-
pulses. But this interpretation can be called
into question. The critics make the mistake
of setting standards for what constitutes



THE GOLDEN MAJESTY of Clermont-Ferrand: a
tenth-century depiction of a celebrated statue of the
Virgin and Child which no longer survives. Objects
of religious art acted as a focus for both the clergy's
and the laity's devotional enthusiasm. They were not
created as a clerical concession to the laity's needs,
but as a shared point of contact.



ST RADEGUND, a sixth-century queen, cures a blind woman. The power of saints survived their deaths, to be drawn upon by the faithful: the cure of bodily afflictions was the most commonly sought manifestation of saintly *virtus*. The help provided in this life also anticipated the saints' intercessory role on behalf of their devotees at the time of divine judgement.

genuine religious conviction which are anachronistic, since they are based on how devout people behave in confessionally pluralistic societies in the post-Reformation world. Other critics cling to the idea that medieval people were indeed capable of deep religious impulses, but that these were satisfied by tenacious pagan survivals from the pre-Christian era—charms, talismans, sorcery, divination, and so on—which were more immediate and trusted than what the Church had to offer. Here the mistake is made of applying much later standards to judge the medieval Church's capacity to translate its own beliefs into other people's behaviour. People in the eleventh century were not historically exceptional in seldom being able to sustain one level of pious commitment throughout their lifetimes: illness, the onset of old age, changes in personal status, and domestic and communal crises have regularly prompted heightened devotion in many religious systems in many periods. This is the norm. What matters is the base level of religious sentiment which is shared by most people most of the time and so serves as a stable cultural reference point. If this standard is followed, western European society on the eve of the First Crusade appears thoroughly Christian.

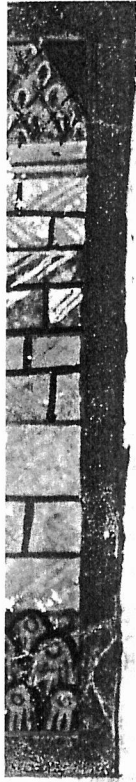
Clerical
be interpreted
anticipating the
principle which
world and
Church take
penance
rupture of
pilgrimage
change, as
by their own
of treating
after the same
erates in the
eleventh century
way sin.

This doctrine
ceived as a
to a 'satisfied
fessed. Urban
paigne, he
before putting
the paradigm



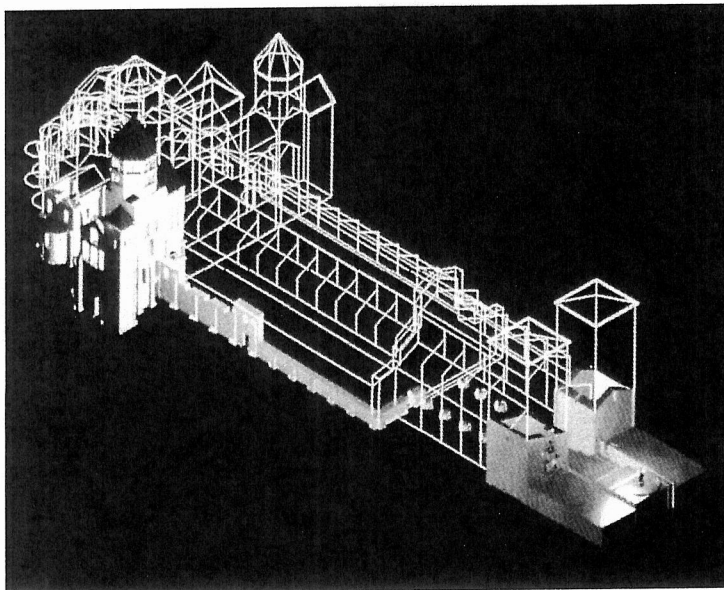
Clerical sensitivity to what seems a something-for-something religious mentality can also be interpreted positively as a sign of the Church's strength, since the sort of reciprocity anticipated by the faithful at Bergues was one, slightly aberrant, offshoot of a fundamental principle which the authorities actively propagated: the idea that the relationship between this world and the next was governed by cause and effect. At the time of the First Crusade the Church taught that sins could be remedied, at least in theory, by acts of penance. For lay people penances usually took the form of periods of sexual and dietary abstinence and a disruption of normal routine: penitents were not permitted, for example, to bear arms. Many pilgrimages were undertaken as penances. Attitudes, it should be noted, were beginning to change, as people wondered whether mere mortals were capable of nullifying their sinfulness by their own puny efforts without a helping hand from God's infinite mercy. But the notion of treating penances as simply the symbolic demonstration of contrition to be undertaken after the sinner has been reconciled through sacramental absolution—the system which operates in the modern Catholic Church—was still undeveloped. In the closing years of the eleventh century the belief remained entrenched that penitential acts could suffice to wash way sin.

This does much to explain the potent appeal of the First Crusade, which Urban II conceived as an act so expensive, long, and emotionally and physically arduous that it amounted to a 'satisfactory' penance capable of undoing all the sins which intending crusaders confessed. Urban knew how his audiences' minds worked. The son of a minor noble from Champagne, he had served in the cathedral of Reims and the great Burgundian abbey of Cluny before pursuing his career in the papal court. His background equipped him to understand the paradox at the heart of lay religious sentiment. Lay people offered ample proof of their

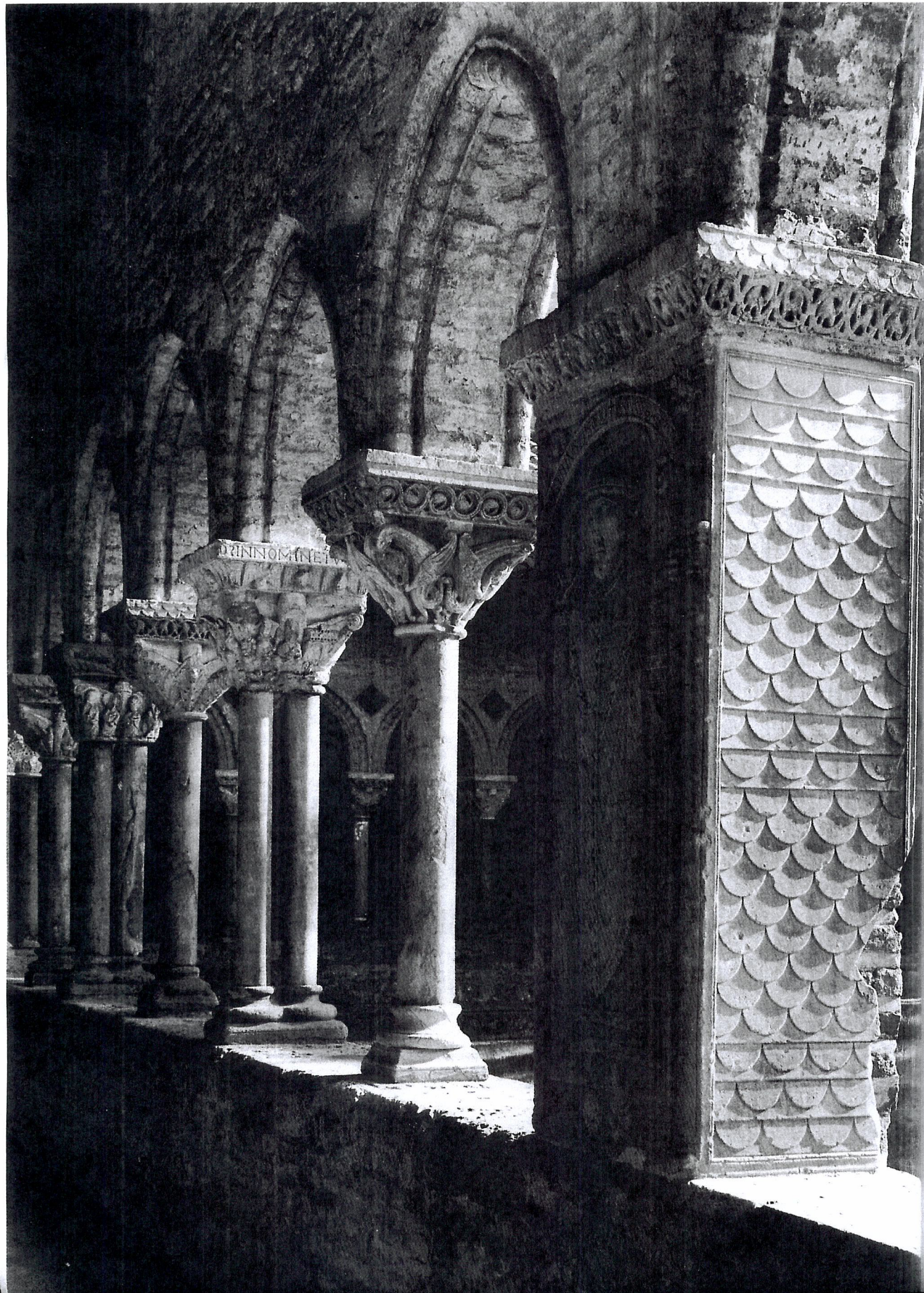


deaths, to be
manifestation of
of their devo-

devout peo-
Other crit-
mpulses, but
a—charms,
d than what
rds to judge
aviour. Peo-
le to sustain
of old age,
y prompted
. What mat-
of the time
stern Euro-



THE ABBEY CHURCH OF CLUNY (Cluny III) in southern Burgundy. Under construction at the time of the First Crusade, Cluny III was the largest church in western Europe, as befitted the status of one of Latin Christendom's most prestigious religious communities. Pope Urban II, once a monk at Cluny, consecrated the church during his French tour.



awareness of
monks and
conduct. But
for them to
keep pace with
the Carolingian
Knot, especially
in particular
decorations. The
salvation was
visions which

The effect was
by Urban I
mer of 1066
king for de
nouring the
(Once again
dent.) The
(twice), An
places was t
the focal po
erated as ce
churchmen
most active
monasteries
most intens
entirely una
touched in
ple in their

MOISSAC, an abbey
famous for its
and most renowned
of lay respect

awareness of their sinfulness, by undertaking pilgrimages, for example, or by endowing the monks and nuns who approximated most closely to the unattainable ideal of sinless human conduct. But their unavoidable immersion in worldly concerns meant that it was impossible for them to perform all the time-consuming and socially disruptive penances which could keep pace with their ever-increasing catalogue of misdeeds. The crusade message cut the Gordian Knot. Here at last was a spiritually effective activity designed specifically for lay people, in particular the warrior élites whose sins were considered among the most numerous and notorious. The laity could aspire, as Guibert of Nogent shrewdly expressed matters, to deserve salvation without abandoning its accustomed dress and by channelling its instincts in directions which accommodated its ingrained social conditioning.

The effect of a message framed in these terms was electrifying. The impact was doubled by Urban II's tour of southern and western France between the autumn of 1095 and the summer of 1096. Moving as an imposing authority figure through areas which had seldom seen a king for decades, the pope drew attention to himself by consecrating churches and altars, honouring the localities through which he passed by means of elaborate liturgical ceremonial. (Once again the close relationship between ritual and communal religious excitement is evident.) The largest suitable urban centres were targeted as temporary bases: Limoges, Poitiers (twice), Angers, Tours, Saintes, and Bordeaux, among others. The particular merit of these places was that they were effectively clusters of prestigious churches which had long served as the focal points of their regions' religious loyalties. They, as well as rural churches, now operated as centres for crusade recruitment. In the areas not covered by the papal itinerary other churchmen busied themselves in generating interest. Monks seem to have been among the most active recruiting agents: many surviving charters reveal departing crusaders turning to monasteries for spiritual reassurance and material assistance. Enthusiasm for the crusade was most intense in France, Italy, and western Germany, but few areas of Latin Christendom were entirely unaffected. As one historian memorably put it, a 'nerve of exquisite feeling' had been touched in the West. The proof was palpable, as between the spring and autumn of 1096 people in their tens of thousands took to the road with one aim—to free Jerusalem.

MOISSAC, an abbey in south-western France which Urban II visited during his tour of France and which possessed a famous collection of relics from Jerusalem. Monasteries such as Moissac, which were often the largest and most renowned religious establishments in their localities and which could draw on well-established pools of lay respect and support, played an important part in propagating the crusade appeal.